

Elks National Memorial pays homage to America's veterans



The imposing rotunda, a place of great prominence, features construction and interior decoration that helped it be recognized as "one of the most magnificent war memorials in the world."



The Elks National Memorial, 2750 N. Lakeview Ave.,

Lincoln Park monument standing for 88 years, welcomes visitors free tours

BY BOB ZULEY

If you're like many North Siders, you've probably walked or driven past the imposing Beaux Arts-style domed edifice standing at Diversey Pkwy. and Lakeview Ave. without knowing what it is or ever stopping in.

The Elks National Memorial, 2750 N. Lakeview Ave., beckons and you won't soon forget the lavish tribute to all of our nation's armed forces veterans.

Constructed between 1924 and 1926, the building was commissioned by the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks who wished to permanently honor the 70,000 members of their order who served in World War I. Ground was broken on this carefully chosen site overlooking Lincoln Park and Lake Michigan in 1923 and the cornerstone was laid on June 7, 1924, and officially dedicated on July 14, 1926.

In a design competition administered by the American Institute of Architects, Egerton Swartwout's design was selected from seven submissions for the building as being the most beautifully distinctive and functionally appropriate.

Swartwout's design combined the features of a contemplative memorial with those of a busy national administrative office creating one harmonious structure.

High quality Indiana limestone forms the imposing exterior while the finest marbles were obtained from Alabama, Missouri, Tennessee, and Vermont, as well as from Austria, Belgium, Greece, and Italy for interior spaces. Visitors may note that the

various types of marble in the columns in the upper rotunda correspond to marbles visible on the rotunda floor.

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The rotunda

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features sculptures by James Earle Fraser depicting the Elks' four cardinal virtues: brotherly love, charity, fidelity, and justice. Other sculptures by Adolph A. Weinman and Laura Gardin Fraser are prominently displayed.

The friezes portray "Triumphs of War" on one side and "Triumphs of Peace" on the other. A number of distinctive murals are displayed including those in the upper rotunda and Grand Reception Room by Eugene Francis Savage, and in the entry hall by Edwin Howland Blashfield.

The Grand Reception Hall is a masterpiece in rare woods, palatial Oriental rugs, and fine furnishings including hand-carved adornments, hand-painted windows, and gold leaf applique.

The entrance is flanked by two large bronze sculptures of elks. The elks rededicated the memorial in 1946, 1976, and 1994 to honor veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam and all subsequent conflicts. The memorial now pays homage to all veterans. On Oct. 1, 2003, the City of Chicago granted the memorial landmark status. From now through October 26, the Elks National Memorial hosts the Chicago

Sculpture International 2014 Biennial Exhibition, Invoking The Absence, curated by Lucas Cowan. The juried exhibition features the artwork of 22 artists playing with the notions of void and its existence in space, time, and order, abstraction, and conflict. The event is free and open to the public.

Trivia buffs and motion picture aficionados may recall scenes from four movies were filmed at the Elks National Memorial. In 1950, Julius Caesar, the first film adaptation with sound of Shakespeare's play was filmed with Chicago area actors, including Charlton Heston as Mark Antony as the only paid cast member. The movie also featured Jeffrey Hunter, Harold Tasker, and David Bradley.

More recently, scenes from The Omen (1976, starring Gregory Peck), What About Bob (1991, starring Bill Murray and Richard Dreyfuss), and Riche Rich (1994, starring Macaulay Culkin) were shot at the Elks National Memorial.

The memorial reopened in April, 2013, after an extensive four-year restoration. It is open free-of-charge from 12 p.m. - 4 p.m. Monday to Saturday through November 15 and is closed for winter - reopening in April 2015.

Accommodating docents are available to patiently answer questions or lead small group tours. Visitors may include veterans, weary Lincoln Park/Lakeview residents, Elks from Canada, or New Zealand farmers. For more information, call 773-755-4876.

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